

After winning reelection in May 2014, President Dalia Grybauskaitė announced a “blacklist” of prominent individuals suspected to be involved in corruption. The eight vice-ministers included all rapidly resigned.

Tensions with Russia surrounding the invasion of Crimea influenced developments in Lithuania in 2014. In March, authorities issued a three-month ban on broadcasts of Russian television channels.

Political Rights and Civil Liberties:

### **Political Rights: 38 / 40 (+1) [Key]**

#### **A. Electoral Process: 12 / 12**

Lithuania’s 1992 constitution established a unicameral, 141-seat Parliament (Seimas), with 71 members elected in single-mandate constituencies and 70 chosen by proportional representation, all for four-year terms. The prime minister is named by the president, but is subject to confirmation by the parliament. The president is directly elected, and may serve up to two five-year terms.

In 2012 parliamentary elections, the Social Democratic Party of Lithuania (LSDP) finished first with 38 seats; the Homeland Union–Lithuanian Christian Democrats (TS-LKD) captured 33 seats; the Labor Party (DP) took 29 seats; the Order and Justice Party (TT) won 11 seats; the Liberal Movement (LRLS) captured 10 seats; and the Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania (LLRA) won 8 seats. LSDP leader Algirdas Butkevičius became the prime minister and assembled a four-party coalition comprising the LSDP, the DP, the TT, and the LLRA. Parliamentary elections were largely free and fair, though there were some reports of irregularities, including alleged bribery and forged ballots. In August 2014, the LLRA resigned from the ruling coalition, largely because it was not granted the minister of energy position.

In March 2014, the Lithuanian Central Electoral Commission refused to register former president Rolandas Paksas for the presidential election, as he was impeached in 2004. The Supreme Administrative Court rejected Paksas’s appeal, upholding a constitutional amendment declaring that persons removed from office by impeachment for having violated a constitutional oath can no longer assume positions involving giving an oath. The European Court of Human Rights had ruled in 2011 that banning Paksas from running for parliament under this rule was illegal.

In May 2014, incumbent president Dalia Grybauskaitė won the presidential run-off against Zigmantas Balčytis, a member of the LSDP. Grybauskaitė became the first Lithuanian president elected to two consecutive terms. The Central Electoral Commission declared the election to be free and fair.

#### **B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 16 / 16**

Lithuania’s political parties generally operate freely, although the Communist Party is banned. Lithuanian politics have been characterized by shifting coalitions among several different parties. The two largest minority groups, Polish (6.6 percent of the population) and Russian (5.8 percent), are represented by the LLRA and the Russian Alliance parties. The two minority parties plan to form a coalition for local elections in 2015.

## **C. Functioning of Government: 10 / 12 (+1)**

While corruption remains an issue in Lithuania, progress has been achieved. Lithuania ranked 39 out of 175 countries and territories in Transparency International's 2014 Corruption Perceptions Index. The European Union (EU) has noted Lithuania's strong commitment to fighting corruption and venerable anticorruption legal framework. However, the EU has noted room for improvement, especially in the area of procurement. Lithuania also has the highest percentage in the EU of people who have been asked or were expected to pay a bribe: 29 percent.

In June, Grybauskaitė declared that she would not approve ministers whose deputies were included on a so-called blacklist created by the Secret Investigation Service (STT). The blacklist contained eight vice-ministers who were allegedly involved in corruption cases. All eight vice-ministers rapidly resigned, including one from the Ministry of Justice, one from the Ministry of Agriculture, three from the Ministry of Environment, and three from the Ministry of Transport and Communications.

In 2014, the Open Government Partnership decided not to evaluate Lithuania's level of openness because the government refused to disclose the data required by the group's methodology.

## **Civil Liberties: 53 / 60**

### **D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 16 / 16**

The government generally respects freedoms of speech and the press. Privately owned newspapers and independent broadcasters express a wide variety of views. However, the press suffers from inadequate standards for transparency of ownership.

Political parties are banned from directly owning news media outlets. While individual party members are excluded from the ban, they are obligated to disclose ownership. A number of both ruling-coalition and opposition politicians are in control of news media outlets. The government does not restrict internet access.

In 2013, Lithuania's STT attempted to compel the Baltic News Service (BNS) to identify its sources after BNS reported that Lithuanian intelligence agents had information about Russian officials' plans to launch a misinformation campaign about Grybauskaitė. As part of a pretrial investigation into the matter, Lithuanian intelligence recorded the telephone conversations of 17 former and current BNS employees. In June 2014, the Vilnius Regional Administrative Court ruled that the wiretapping was unlawful.

In July, Grybauskaitė signed amendments to the Law on Provision of Information to the Public and to the Code of Criminal Procedure. Under these amendments, prosecutorial procedures with the potential of impinging upon press freedom or individual rights—such as searches, the seizure of property, and surveillance by law enforcement—can be only carried out in cases of great public interest. Further amendments to the Law on Public Information in December suggested penalties for media outlets that spread war propaganda, urge changes in the constitutional order, or challenge the country's sovereignty.

In March, the Vilnius Regional Administrative Court, at the request of the Lithuanian Radio and Television Commission (LRTK), issued a three-month ban on broadcasts of Russian television channels NTV Mir and RTR Planeta. Both channels were found to have violated Lithuanian broadcasting regulations: MTV Mir

aired a pro-Soviet documentary judged to be misleading and derogatory, and RTR Planeta incited public discord in its coverage of the situation in Crimea. In Lithuania, Russian programs make up 22 percent of total television broadcasting, while Lithuanian programs make up 23 percent.

Freedom of religion is guaranteed by law and largely upheld in practice. However, nine so-called traditional religious communities, including the Roman Catholic Church, enjoy certain government benefits, including annual subsidies, that are not granted to other groups. Academic freedom is respected.

## **E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 11 / 12**

Freedoms of assembly and association are generally observed. However, individuals and groups must obtain permission from authorities before staging protests of more than 15 people. Nongovernmental organizations may register without facing serious obstacles, and human rights groups can operate without restrictions. Workers may form and join trade unions, strike, and engage in collective bargaining, though there have been reports of employees being punished for attempting to organize.

## **F. Rule of Law: 13 / 16**

The constitution guarantees judicial independence, which is largely respected in practice. Defendants generally enjoy due process rights, including the presumption of innocence and freedom from arbitrary arrest and detention, but detained suspects are not always granted timely access to an attorney. Police abuse of detainees and lengthy pretrial detentions are lingering issues. In 2014, a UN committee found that Lithuania's prisons continue to suffer from a number of problems, including overcrowding, substandard living conditions, and lack of access to essential services such as health care and sanitation facilities.

Discrimination against ethnic minorities, who comprise about 16 percent of the population, remains a problem. The Polish minority has demanded the right to spell their names in their original form and to use bilingual location signs in areas with large Polish populations. However, Lithuanian law indicates that public signs must be written only in Lithuanian.

In September, the State Commission for the Lithuanian Language ruled that foreigners who become naturalized Lithuanian citizens and Lithuanians who adopt the last name of their foreign spouse after marriage may use the original spellings of their names on state documents. In July, the Seimas adopted amendments to the Law on Passports that allow citizens to register their ethnicity in their passport if they choose to do so.

Members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community face discrimination. A proposal to ban sex reassignment surgery stalled in 2012, but these procedures are still not possible under the Civil Code. While the code theoretically allows for such surgery in the case of unmarried adults, it stipulates that certain medical regulations must first be enacted by law. A bill that would have done so was voted down in July 2014.

## **G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 13 / 16**

Lithuanian residents may travel freely within the country and internationally. They generally enjoy economic

freedom.

Men and women enjoy the same legal rights, though women generally earn less than men per hour worked. Lithuania's constitution defines marriage as a union between a man and a woman.

In May 2014, Lithuania ended its ban on the sale of land to foreigners and legal entities, as it had promised to do upon its accession to the EU in 2004. However, in June the government held a referendum on reinstating the ban; the referendum failed due to very low voter turnout (referendums can only pass if more than 50 percent of eligible voters participate).

### **Scoring Key: X / Y (Z)**

**X = Score Received**

**Y = Best Possible Score**

**Z = Change from Previous Year**

**[Full Methodology](#)**